

Grant Proposal Report from Task Force

Recommendation: Forward or fund only if corrections can be negotiated

Legal Applicant: Maine Development Foundation

Program Name: Not submitted

Category: ☐ AC Formula -- Standard
☒ AC Formula – Rural State
☐ AC Competitive
☐ Other Competition

Type: ☐ Planning
☒ Operating
☐ Fixed Price
☐ Ed Award Only

Federal Focus Area: Capacity Building

Applicant type: ☒ New (no prior AmeriCorps)
☐ Re-compete (# of yrs: __)

Proposed Dates: Start: 07/01/20 End: 06/30/21

Requested Resources: Funds and Slots

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	6,865		55,027
Member Support	71,395		23,909
Indirect (Admin)	822		19,017
CNCS Award amount	79,082	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	97,953
% sharing proposed	45%		55%
% share required	70%		30%
Cost-per-member proposed	\$15,816 (\$14,279 allowed)		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years:	Slot Types Requested						
	FT	HT	RHT	QT	MT		Total
Slots With living allowance	5						5
Slots with only ed award							

Program Description (executive summary):

The Maine Development Foundation proposes to have five AmeriCorps members who will provide capacity building to a community selected through a competitive process in one of the Maine Downtown Centers champion communities which include the ten Main Street communities and two of the high performing Maine Downtown Affiliate communities. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for creating economic opportunity in their host community through direct program assistance to the downtown organization. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 10-20 volunteers who will be engaged in local research, planning, education and technology projects through a range of projects in communities that strengthen local resilience. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area(s) of Economic Opportunity. The CNCS investment of \$82,429 will be matched with \$148,534 \$61,767 in public funding and \$86,767 in private funding.

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

- ☐ Within a single municipality ☐ Within a single County but not covering the entire County
☐ County-wide in a single County ☐ Multiple Counties but not Statewide
☒ Statewide

Service locations/Host sites:

- 5 unidentified downtown communities

Performance measures (targets proposed for Year 1):MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

OUTPUT: Number of AmeriCorps program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge, and abilities related to the service assignment (community, tasks, and sector).

Proposed target: 5

OUTCOME: Number of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge.

Proposed target: 5

CAPACITY BUILDING

OUTPUT: G3-3.4: Number of organizations that received capacity building services

Proposed target: 5

OUTPUT: G3-3.10A: Number of organizations that increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and or program reach

Proposed target: 3

Scoring Detail:

Peer Reviewer Consensus Score. *Assessment of narrative using point distribution from federal agency. Major categories (Program Design, Organizational Capability, Budget and Cost) are dictated by CFR rubric for scoring. The break downs within categories are from federal agency and change annually.*

Program Design	
Need	3.35
Intervention	8
Theory of Change, Evidence & Logic Model	5.36
Work Plan	8
Funding Priority	1
AC member training	6
AC member supervision	4.02
AC member experience	3.35
Commitment to AC identity	2.01
Organizational Capability	
Organizational Background & Staffing	10
Compliance/Accountability	15
Cost Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy	
Cost effectiveness + Budget Adequacy	16.75
Final Totals	
Program Design	41.09
Organizational Capability	25
Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy	16.75
Peer Reviewer Final Consensus Score	82.84

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Score
Program Model	10.05
Past Performance	10.05
Financial Plan	0
Fiscal Systems	6.7
Total Task Force Total Score	26.8
Peer Review Total Score	82.84
Final Score for Applicant	109.64

Final Assessment of Application:

- ☐ Fund with no corrections/modifications
- ☒ Fund with corrections/modifications
- ☐ Do Not Fund

Referenced Conditions/Corrections

- **Logic Model:** MCCA staff and MDF are working through a logic model that represents their program design. Typically having some different voices involved makes for a more robust conversation and a better final product. The logic model will likely feed back into their narratives and prompt some changes there. There are some weaknesses identified by the peer reviewers, especially in the theory of change and the project timeline.
(Addendum 6/22: Logic model completed and approved by staff.)
- **Performance Measures:** Member Development and Capacity building performance measures specified in the RFP will be updated in the application on 6/23.
- **Budget:** The budget is a bit of a mess and needs both corrections and adjustments. The indirect does need to be corrected (though the amounts are correct, they are in the wrong lines). The total cost is higher than the maximum cost per MSY permitted in the RFP and this gets worse when the indirect is corrected. There are at least a dozen calculations that do not total to the amounts entered, and there are a few language items that need to be clearer.
- **MSY:** Needs to be lowered as it cannot exceed the maximum cost/MSY.
- **Executive Summary:** Must align with the corrected budget in the narrative

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design.

- Describes the need of economic development, though data is very limited.
- MDF has data on their website that should be included here.
- MDF has been meeting with downtown community leaders for the past several months to understand specific concerns considering COVID-19. This shows that the need for more personnel in downtown programs is based on first-person accounts from community leaders.
- Will do more gap analysis after funding is cart before the house. Would like to see more data that specifies what the challenges are in downtowns.

Organizational Capability.

- Solid organization with good staffing structure
- Staff have relevant experience managing AmeriCorps and other mentoring programs.
- MDF has experience managing volunteers. MDF has a strong background in using research to publish reports and drive its programs

Budget Adequacy and Cost Effectiveness. (CNCS did not allow narrative for this section in this year's application. They directed reviewers to consider the budget narrative and its formulas, accuracy, expense items.)

- Strong organization
- This budget looks reasonable and all costs are explained
- Was over cost-per-member
- Some calculation errors

Data Collection Plan. (Refers to applicant's plan for collecting data that will be used for performance measurement, continuous improvement, and development of an evaluation plan.)

- The application demonstrates a strong plan for data collection and continuous improvement (new publications, downtown businesses served). It is modeled after the successful Island Fellows program and follows the National Main St approach.
- Though the application is not able to quantify individuals and businesses served, they demonstrate a plan for acquiring that data.

SUMMARY APPRAISAL

Is this applicant likely to be effective in this category of grant? Yes

- Yes- because the Maine Development Foundation has a solid reputation working with Maine Downtown Centers, and strong relationships with community leaders.
- They have a strong staffing structure with highly skilled employees.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- Theory of change, and which needs will be addressed and how.
- Need to clarify whether fundraising and other activities that are generally prohibited or limited, are they allowed when they are performed for sub-grantee organizations (i.e. local partners).
- The degree to which these members will work directly with local businesses.
- Needs more emphasis on the member in the proposal. That would have made it stronger as would up-to-date research.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- It would have been nice to see them cite some statistics to prove the needs, even if just as examples of possible projects. Admittedly, they have not done the RFPs yet for placements, so are unsure of specific needs, but they could have pulled some compelling stats or case studies into the application to strengthen their case.
- This is a timely proposal in light of the impact that COVID 19 has had on our downtowns, which are supported by small businesses.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Model. This section's criteria relate to alignment of proposal with funding priorities in RFP, significance of program in the context of statewide issues, the applicant's readiness to take on a significant cadre

of volunteers (AmeriCorps members) and it's demonstrated ability to engage volunteers, and the match between the program traits and Commission funding goals.

- The applicant's goals are in alignment with the guidelines outlined by the RFP. However, unclear methods for measuring success, both qualitatively and quantitatively make the application less strong and it would otherwise be. It is the intention of the applicant to develop program goals and indicators in the first year of the program.
- It is unclear by what metric, MDF will consider their volunteer placements within each organization to be successful.
- MDF seems to have outlined a significant and well-conceived approach to recruitment and training of members. Their connections throughout the state should aid with placement. Capacity building at the local level looks likely.
- While the narrative is compelling and makes sense, there is some lack of specificity in the quantification of some of the listed needs and a very broad set of goals.

Assessment of Past Performance

- MDF reports having significant capacity, expertise, leadership, and the networks to make this proposed work successful. Their strong connection to the Main Street organizations and the Maine Downtown Center will help increase their footprint across the state.
- The history and track record of the applicant is extremely strong and dependable, the Program Director position being open is a bit of a concern but whereas the organizational chart does not indicate that to be an issue.

Assessment of Financial Plan

- There are errors in the budget, but otherwise, the proposed spending plans seems reasonable and necessary.
- Corrections need to be made to the budget before proceeding
- The applicant would be successful due to their track record and experience, but the timeline and budget issues be clarified and corrected

Fiscal Systems

- MDF has clearly outlined a basic mechanism for ensuring compliance and monitoring expenditures. They have been subject to independent auditing and received grants from several sources with no adverse findings.